




Recycle: It's good for environment, makes money, saves energy

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Here's a resolution that's easy to keep. Recycle.

Can you think of any good reason not to? I can't. But I can think of lots of reasons why I should. This year I am determined to make a difference at home and at work!

First of all, recycling works. I like the fact that it makes products, not waste. Here in Maine we produce a variety of products from recycling, most notably paper goods and composite lumber. Recycled fiber is in our newspapers and books, our printing and writing paper, packaging and is even in paper plates, tissue products and take-out trays.

Another common item, milk jugs, can be remade into many things, including sophisticated plastics such as the durable composite decking boards produced in Biddeford at Correct Building Products, manufacturers of CorrectDeck.

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Maine has a goal to recycle 50 percent of the waste we generate. Services of one type or another are offered to throughout the state, reaching approximately 98 percent of the population. Pittsfield and Skowhegan are two examples of solid programs.

Don Chute, manager of Pittsfield's transfer station, says his town's recyclables now realize \$80,000 in gross revenue compared to \$8,000 in during the early 1990s. Similarly, Mark Draper, solid waste director at the Tri-Community Landfill which services 13 towns, reports its highest revenue ever. Strong markets have helped these communities prove that recycling makes economic sense.

We even have towns that prove it's possible to recycle 60 percent or more of their municipal waste: Belfast, the Boothbay Region, Cape Elizabeth, Casco, Topsham, Newport and others. Each ton of recycling translates into disposal fees that don't have to be paid. That is the type of news taxpayers prefer. The right economy of scale -- more recycling, less trash -- creates a cost-effective system.

Recycling is a money-making business, grossing revenues of \$222 billion annually in the U.S. Take a look at what your town is sending to the landfill or waste-to-energy plant. Even in places with strong recycling programs, we are still spending thousands of dollars to bury or burn materials that could be turned into products and profit. We can fix this.

By recycling, we can reduce the environmental impacts of the products we use. Together we can create significant savings in the water and energy used in manufacturing and reduce the resulting pollution. For example, when a can is made from recycled aluminum, it uses 95 percent less energy than when made from the ore, bauxite. This reduces fuel use, emissions and production and transportation costs.

There are other benefits, too. Consider for example, that by recycling the steel industry saves enough energy to power 18 million households for a whole year! That means that more is available for you and me. This is critical at a time when fuel costs and business and household needs are placing great stress on users.

Around the world, technologic and economic changes are making it easier than ever to recycle. Advances in processing equipment are simplifying how we sort materials. As recycling becomes more convenient, more Mainers are becoming recyclers. Perhaps you are already one of them. If not, perhaps this new year you will resolve to recycle. I have.

Jetta Antonakos is a recycling planner in the State Planning Office and lives in Old Orchard Beach. To learn about recycling in Maine, what it becomes and where